

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
National Mall
West Potomac Park
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-857
DC-857

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
District of Columbia War Memorial

HABS No. DC-857

- Location: The District of Columbia War Memorial is located in West Potomac Park, approximately 180 feet north of Independence Avenue SW, and in alignment with 19th Street NW.
- Present Owner: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service
- Significance: The District of Columbia War Memorial was built in 1931 to commemorate the armed forces from the District of Columbia who served in World War I. It was the first war memorial to be built in West Potomac Park, and is the only local D.C. memorial on the National Mall.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date:

The District of Columbia War Memorial was dedicated on November 11, 1931.¹ An Act of Congress authorized the War Memorial on June 7, 1924.²

2. Architect:

Frederick H. Brooke, an architect based in Washington, DC designed the District of Columbia War Memorial. The associate architects were Horace W. Peaslee and Nathan C. Wyeth.

Frederick H. Brooke (1877-1960) was a native of Birdsboro, Pennsylvania and was a graduate of Yale University, where he was a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon and Skull and Bones. In 1901-1902 he studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, and he continued his studies at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris until 1906. In that year he came to Washington, D.C., where he was to practice architecture for 40 years. Brooke was a member of the American Institute of Architects committee which was instrumental in bringing about legislation in 1925 for the registration of architects in the District. He was also a member of the Executive Committee of the D.C. Allied Architects, and served on the Board of Examiners of, and Registrars for, local architects for 10 years.

Brooke was the local architect for the British Embassy. He designed extensive alterations and additions for the Embassies of Iran and New Zealand, and for the Chanceries of the Swedish, Dutch, and New Zealand Embassies. In Georgetown, where he was an early advocate of preservation, he designed alterations and additions for Dumbarton Oaks. Abroad, he designed the United States Consulate in Blue Fields,

¹ *Chicago Daily Tribune*. 11 November 1931.

² H.P. Calmmerer. Washington, The National Capital. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1932.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
HABS No. DC-857 (Page 2)

Nicaragua. He also designed residential, school and church structures throughout the Washington area and he received the Washington Board of Trade's Diploma of Merit in 1932 for his work on the District of Columbia War Memorial. He died December 24, 1960.³

Nathan C. Wyeth (1870-1963), who also trained at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, designed a number of notable houses for prominent Washingtonians in the first decades of the twentieth century. His other significant commissions included the 1909 alterations to the West Wing of the White House and the U.S.S. Maine Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery. He subsequently served as Municipal Architect for the District of Columbia.⁴

Horace W. Peaslee (1884-1959) began his career as a designer of parks. He was involved in the design of Meridian Hill Park, and also designed the Zero Milestone in front of the White House, "from which all distances of places through the continent were to be calculated."⁵ He directed the restoration of several important Washington houses, including Dumbarton House and the Maples.⁶ He was Director of Housing for the Public Works Administration, and served as President of the Washington Chapter/AIA (1929-30).

3. Original and subsequent owners:

The District of Columbia War Memorial was a gift from the citizens of the District of Columbia and of the District of Columbia Memorial Commission to the city. The National Park Service, National Mall and Memorial Parks, administers it.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:

The District of Columbia World War Memorial Commission awarded the construction contract for the memorial to James Baird, Co. Baird put in the lowest bid and was well known in Washington, having constructed the Internal Revenue Building. He was also the owner of several buildings in Washington and was one of the largest taxpayers in the District.⁷

The white marble for the memorial was purchased from the Vermont Marble Co., from the Danby quarry at Danby, Vermont. Danby marble had been used for the recently-completed Arlington Amphitheater, and would subsequently be used for the Jefferson Memorial.⁸

³ *The Washington Post*. 25 December 1960. A11.

⁴ See HABS No. VA-1348-D. Arlington National Cemetery, *USS Maine* Memorial. Library of Congress. HABS/HAER/HALS Collection.

⁵ <http://www.womeninmining.org/Washingtondetour.htm>

⁶ <http://www.dumbartonhouse.org/restoration.htm>

⁷ *The Evening Star*. 4 April 1931. A-1.

⁸ *The Evening Star*. 10 November 1931.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
HABS No. DC-857 (Page 3)

5. Original plans and construction:

One blueprint sheet for a preliminary design, dated May 1, 1925 (revised July 2, 1925 and December 17, 1925), shows the Memorial with a six-stepped stylobate, bronze rails, and a curved stair to a basement chamber.⁹ A set of five blueprint sheets, dated March 4, 1931, apparently served as construction documents and show the Memorial as built. (Sheet 5 was revised March 18, 1931.)¹⁰

6. Alterations and additions:

There have been no significant alterations to the Memorial itself. Minor changes have been made to the site over the years, including the installation of new paving.¹¹

B. Historical Context:

Completed in 1931, the District of Columbia War Memorial was built to commemorate the District residents who served the nation in the armed forces during World War I. The Memorial lists the names alphabetically of all the D.C. residents who lost their lives in the war, regardless of their race, class, or gender. It is the only local D.C. memorial on the National Mall.¹²

Despite its location on the Mall, it is a little known monument. As designed by Frederick H. Brooke, the simple Doric structure is barely seen through the trees along Independence Avenue, and its modest size befits its role as a local monument in a city of national monuments. The memorial to the 26,000 District residents who served in World War I is set back about 180 feet from Independence Avenue just west of the Kutz Bridge over the Tidal Basin. Close-bunched trees along the avenue screen it from casual view by passing traffic.¹³ The monument was constructed as a circular dome supported by a peristyle of twelve Doric fluted columns. At 47 feet high and 45 feet in diameter, it was large enough to accommodate an eighty-piece band. Shortly before construction began a small change was made in that a four-foot base with stairs to the platform was added on which the names of the war dead could be carved.¹⁴

An Act of Congress authorized the War Memorial on June 7, 1924. A memorial commission, formed of Washington citizens, was established to organize a campaign for popular subscriptions to build the white marble monument. The Commission of Fine Arts chose the site of the memorial on marshy land in a grove of trees in West Potomac

⁹ Ibid. District of Columbia War Memorial Clippings File. National Capital Region, National Park Service. Revised Drawing, 17 December 1925.

¹⁰ District of Columbia War Memorial Clippings File. National Capital Region, National Park Service. Revised Drawing, 4 March 1931.

¹¹ Drawings located in the Records of the Commission of Fine Arts, RG 287, NARA.

¹² John Kelly, "For the Great War, a Peaceful Memorial," *The Washington Post* (27 May 2004): C11

¹³ Tom Sherwood and Mark David Richards, "Responsibilities Without Rights," *The Washington Post* (26 May 2002): B8

¹⁴ H.P. Calmmerer, *Washington, The National Capital* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1932), 1.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
HABS No. DC-857 (Page 4)

Park. The memorial commission was made up of notable Washingtonians, including Frank B. Noyes, President of *The Evening Star* and Edmund F. Jewell, publisher of *The Washington Times* and *The Washington Herald*.¹⁵ This committee was placed in charge of leading the public campaign to raise funds for the memorial.

Numerous local civic organizations, along with individual men and women, were involved in distributing pledge cards and raising funds. These included the street car and bus companies, the two radio broadcasting companies, the motion picture theaters and vaudeville houses, hotels, banks, large stores, the Boy and Girl Scouts, the police and fire departments, and women's clubs and organizations. Women's clubs held luncheons and set up about forty booths in government buildings and places of business. Men and women organized into teams with captains, members, and individual workers. Dr. Frank W. Ballou, superintendent of schools, together with members of the Board of Education, made preparations to involve the 70,000 school children by asking each one to contribute five cents. All children who contributed were given buttons with the number "535", the number of the District's war dead, and a sketch of the Doric temple. Newspapers pointed out that while contributions from school children were usually discouraged, in this case school officials felt that being a part of the fundraising campaign and being acquainted with the purposes of the memorial would be an important part of their education.¹⁶ At the direction of President Calvin Coolidge, his cabinet, chief clerks of all federal departments and establishments were authorized to receive subscriptions to fund the memorial. Disabled veterans were, not surprisingly, also strong supporters of the memorial. They had a "sentimental interest" in the memorial and felt it would "not only add to the architectural beauty of the city but combine a practical use in the form of a place where band concerts may be conducted."¹⁷

Organized labor in Washington asked for and received the privilege of raising the balance between the large sum already subscribed for the memorial and the total sum considered necessary before the actual work of construction could begin. It was announced in *The Star* by the Executive Committee of the Central Labor Union that they were about to reach their goal of \$20,000. With a total sum of approximately \$155,000 raised as a result of the campaign by organized labor in the District, construction of the memorial could begin in spring 1931.¹⁸

Construction began with the sinking of reinforced concrete piles into the soft subsoil, to bedrock below. Two months were required to quarry and finish the marble at the Danby quarry. The landscaping of the Memorial was begun, as well. A memorial grove of fine hardwood native trees was planted around the memorial. Several large elms were planted about 50 feet around the temple. Large tulip trees were planted at a greater distance, and oaks, beech, and smaller elms were planted irregularly in

¹⁵ <http://www.dcmwatch.com/richards/020526.htm>

¹⁶ *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), 16 May 1927.

¹⁷ *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC) 24 May 1926.

¹⁸ *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC) 11 November 1930.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
HABS No. DC-857 (Page 5)

between the two types of trees. James L. Greenleaf, a local landscape architect and former member of the Commission of Fine Arts, approved the memorial grove design.¹⁹

On July 20, 1931 the cornerstone for the Memorial was sealed. Inside this stone was a list of the District's war service men, typed on a special 100 percent cotton fiber paper, the kind used in currency printing. This paper was furnished by the office of the C.W. Scribner, chief of the paper division of the Bureau of Standards and it was the most long-lived paper known to science at the time. The box, a container about a foot square by 18 inches long was sealed after the list of names had been placed in it. At that point Charles G. Weber, also of the paper division, exhausted the air and introduced nitrogen in order to prevent decay. It was then sealed in a specially prepared copper box and placed within the carved niche on the inner face of the corner stone by Maj. Gen Anton Stephan, a member of the District of Columbia War Memorial Commission. Frederick H. Brooke, the architect for the project, assisted him. In addition to the list of the District's army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard men, the box contained plans of the Memorial, a copy of *The Star* and coins and paper currency of the latest dates.²⁰

On September 30, 1931, Abner L. Roe placed the keystone of the dome in position using the same trowel used to lay the cornerstone of the Folger Shakespeare Library. The Memorial was dedicated on Armistice Day, November 11. Informal invitations to the services were issued to the public through the press. Patriotic gatherings and flag draped streets marked the day. John Phillip Sousa came to Washington to lead the United States Marine Band in "The Stars and Stripes Forever". Sousa dressed his rank, wearing the uniform of a lieutenant commander of the Navy. A Gold Star Mother of one of the war dead was scheduled to lay a wreath upon the Memorial. Frank Noyes officially introduced and presented the Memorial to the United States. During his introduction, Noyes described the Memorial as a testimonial to the community's gratitude and pride. President Hoover, making an appeal for world peace, dedicated the Memorial in an address starting at 11am, the same hour – the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month – that the war had ended in 1918. General John J. Pershing also spoke at the event. The entire proceedings were broadcast throughout the nation on the Columbia Broadcasting System and on the National Broadcasting System.²¹ The first park band program was inaugurated the following year, on June 2, 1932. The 77-member United States Marine Band opened with "Heroes All" to an audience of 2,000 who sat on the grass around the Memorial.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character:

¹⁹ <http://www.dcmwatch.com/richards/020526.htm>

²⁰ *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC) 20 July 1931.

²¹ *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago) 11 November 1931, 12 November 1931. *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC) 9 November 1931, 10 November 1931, 11 November 1931.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
HABS No. DC-857 (Page 6)

The circular, domed, classical temple (or monument) is a building type with a long and distinguished history, dating to ancient times. The Choragic Monument of Lysicrates in Athens (334 B.C.) is an early notable example. The Romans built numerous circular temples, including the Temple of Vesta (205) in the Roman Forum, where the Vestal Virgins kept the sacred fire alight. The form was revived during the Italian Renaissance, most significantly with Donato Bramante's Tempietto at San Pietro in Montorio in Rome (1502-10). The circular temple was an especially popular feature of eighteenth century English gardens, such as Sir John Vanbrugh's Rotondo at Stowe (1721). In fact, the District of Columbia War Memorial's location in the pastoral, naturalistic landscape of West Potomac Park places it firmly in this English tradition.

The Memorial is described in a 2004 letter to *The Washington Post* as "a great circular dome supported by a peristyle of twelve Doric fluted columns. There is a complete harmony of form by the repeated use of the column form, geometric purity, and the use of the accepted proportions." The impact of the Memorial is heightened by its "invocation of the Temple of Vesta at Tivoli from around 200 A.D." A domed rotunda supported by a colonnade is a long-established icon for the reconciliation of Christian and human ideals. "It is a sacred space and a fit refuge for contemplation."²²

2. Condition of fabric:

In 1968 serious structural deficiencies were reported to the regional director by the superintendent of National Capital Parks – Central. In August 1968, a staff architect detailed problems and pointed out that in a number of cases the work done originally did not match the original drawings. Problems included: various kinds of drainage, the deterioration of the mortar in most of the marble masonry joints, and fissures and spalls in the marble. Work was undertaken to fix these problems. However by 2005, drainage and deterioration of the mortar due to standing water were once again a problem.²³

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions:

The base of the Memorial is 45'-4" in diameter at the bottom ledge. The overall height of the Memorial is approximately 47' from the sidewalk to the top of the dome.

2. Foundations:

²² *The Washington Post*. 24 February 2004.

²³ . District of Columbia War Memorial Clippings File. National Capital Parks – Central. Letter from William R. Failor, Superintendent to the Regional Director. 16 July 1968. District of Columbia War Memorial File. National Capital Parks – Central. Letter from William A. Dennin, Staff Architect to the Superintendent. 21 August 1968.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
HABS No. DC-857 (Page 7)

Forty-eight reinforced concrete piles (four beneath each column) support a 6' wide, 3'-6" thick, dodecagonal concrete slab around the exterior of the Memorial. An 8" concrete slab, resting on fill, supports the interior floor.²⁴

3. Walls:

All exterior surfaces of the Memorial are marble. A 4' tall base, with two ledges, serves as the temple platform. Twelve 22'-tall Doric columns, fluted and baseless, support a 6'-tall entablature. The entablature features 24 regulae at the top of the architrave, and dentils beneath the corona of the cornice.

4. Roof:

The roof of the Memorial is a dome consisting of an outer sheathing of marble shingles resting on an inner Guastavino tile dome. Rafael Guastavino y Moreno (1842-1908), a Catalan mason/architect who emigrated to New York, patented a vaulting system of thin-shell, laminated terra cotta tile, which was both structural and fireproof. The Guastavino Company remained in operation until the 1960s.

5. Decorative features and trim:

Base: A recessed panel, immediately to the west of the north stair, is inscribed in seriph lettering:

THE NAMES OF THE MEN AND WOMEN FROM THE DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN THE WORLD WAR ARE
HERE INSCRIBED AS A PERPETUAL RECORD OF THEIR
PATRIOTIC SERVICE TO THEIR COUNTRY. THOSE WHO FELL
AND THOSE WHO SURVIVED HAVE GIVEN TO THIS AND TO
FUTURE GENERATIONS AN EXAMPLE OF HIGH IDEALISM
COURAGEOUS SACRIFICE AND GALLANT ACHIEVEMENT

A corresponding recessed panel, immediately to the east of the north stair, is inscribed in seriph lettering:

THIS MEMORIAL WAS ERECTED THROUGH THE VOLUNTARY
SUBSCRIPTIONS OF THE PEOPLE OF WASHINGTON. IT WAS
DEDICATED ON ARMISTICE DAY NINETEEN HUNDRED AND
THIRTY-ONE BY HERBERT HOOVER PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES. WITHIN THIS CORNER-STONE ARE
RECORDED THE NAMES OF THE TWENTY-SIX THOUSAND
WASHINGTONIANS WHO WHEN THE UNITED STATES ENTERED
THE WORLD WAR ANSWERED THE CALL TO ARMS AND

²⁴ On the 4 March 1931 drawing by Frederick H. Brooke. District of Columbia War Memorial Clippings File. National Capital Region.

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
HABS No. DC-857 (Page 8)**

SERVED IN THE ARMY NAVY MARINE CORPS AND COAST
GUARD.

Twenty-four panels list the names, alphabetically, of the 499 D.C. residents who lost their lives during World War I, in sans serif lettering. Interspersed among the name panels are six panels with circular, bas-relief medallions, three on each side. The northeast medallion depicts the seal of the United States Coast Guard. The east medallion depicts a fasces with double-headed axe in front of a shield, six stars, and the inscription "THE GREAT WAR FOR CIVILIZATION"; this design was used on the reverse side of the Victory Medal, a medal given to all active duty troops who served in World War I. The southeast medallion depicts the seal of the United States Marine Corps. The southwest medallion depicts the seal of the United States Navy. The west medallion depicts the seal of the District of Columbia. The northwest medallion depicts the Great Seal of the United States.

On the west side of the south steps, in the same sans serif lettering as the name panels, is inscribed:

FREDERICK H. BROOKE
ARCHITECT
HORACE W. PEASLEE
NATHAN C. WYETH
ASSOCIATE ARCHITECTS

Entablature: Inscribed on the frieze, in large serif lettering, is:

A MEMORIAL TO THE ARMED FORCES OF THE DISTRICT OF
COLUMBIA WHO SERVED THEIR COUNTRY IN THE GREAT WAR

Centered above the north stair in the frieze is a bas-relief eagle, clutching two arrows.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor:

The floor of the Memorial is a flat circular platform, 43'-5" in diameter, paved with 4"-thick marble tiles in two colors, in an ornamental radial pattern. A circular metal plate in the center conceals the hexagonal opening to a small crawl space. There are two flights of eight steps, each aligned axially at the north and south sides of the Memorial, leading up to the platform.

2. Ceiling:

The columns support a 2'-4" tall marble entablature. Above the entablature is a shallow, coffered saucer dome. This inner dome consists of marble facing on the

underside of a second Guastavino tile dome. The top side of the dome is covered with tar and parging for waterproofing purposes. The height of the interior dome is 32'-2 ½" above the floor platform. Approximately 8' of space separates the inner dome vertically from the outer dome in the center. Installed in this space is a mechanism, consisting of two pulleys and a counter-weight, which allows the keystone of the inner dome to be lifted vertically, in order to provide access to the space between the domes.

3. Mechanical and Electrical Equipment:

Because the Memorial is an open-air structure, there are no heating, ventilating or air-conditioning systems. A drainage system for the dome consists of a copper-lined gutter which runs around the base of the dome, and downspouts which run down the center of four of the columns. A lighting system is installed in the cove behind the interior cornice, and electrical equipment is installed in the crawl space below the floor.

D. Site

The Commission of Fine Arts chose the site for the Memorial, on flat, marshy land in a grove of trees in West Potomac Park. The Memorial is surrounded by a circular area of flagstone paving, with the paving immediately adjacent to the Memorial in a distinct geometric pattern. National Park Service information panels were installed to the northeast and to the southwest of the Memorial in 2004. Two parallel flagstone walks, defining an open vista, lead south to Independence Avenue. Similarly, two parallel flagstone walks define another open vista, leading north to the walkway adjacent to the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. Mature trees, primarily elms, maples, and oaks, flank the east and west sides of the Memorial. The undergrowth consists primarily of azaleas and dogwoods, providing an element of color in the landscape in spring, and enhancing the beauty of the Memorial's architecture.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural drawings
National Capital Regional Office

Located on Ohio Drive, SW, the National Capital Regional Office houses the original drawings of most of the monuments and memorials that are under the purview of National Capital Parks - Central. They are currently in the process of accessioning and scanning these drawings.

National Mall and Memorial Parks

Located on Ohio Drive, SW, the National Mall and Memorial Parks office has clippings files that have copies of several revised drawings from 1925-1931.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
HABS No. DC-857 (Page 10)

National Archives @ College Park, Maryland

The records of the Commission of Fine Arts includes several drawings of the District of Columbia War Memorial that include proposed landscaping features.

B. Early Views

Commission of Fine Arts

Located in the National Building Museum at 401 F Street, NW, the Commission of Fine Arts has a vertical file on the District of Columbia War Memorial that includes several early photographs of both the finished memorial and several early proposed models and drawings.

C. Bibliography

Primary Sources:

The Chicago Daily Tribune. 11 November 1931; 12 November 1931
The Evening Star. 24 May 1926; 11 November 1930; 4 April 1931; 20 July 1931; 9 November 1931; 10 November 1931; 11 November 1931.

The Washington Post. 16 May 1927; 25 December 1960; 24 February 2004; 27 May 2004.

Arlington National Cemetery, *USS Maine* Memorial. HABS No. VA-1348-D. Library of Congress. Built in America. HABS/HAER/HALS Collection.

District of Columbia War Memorial Clippings File. National Mall and Memorial Parks.

<http://www.womeninmining.org/Washingtondetour.htm>

<http://www.dumbartonhouse.org/restoration.htm>

<http://www.dcwatch.com/richards/020526.htm>

Secondary Sources

Calmmmerer, H.P. Washington, The National Capital. Washington, DC: Us Government Printing Office, 1932.

Kelly, John. "For the Great War, a Peaceful Memorial." *The Washington Post* (27 May 2004): C11.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WAR MEMORIAL
HABS No. DC-857 (Page 11)

Sherwood, Tom and Mark David Richards. "Responsibilities Without Rights." *The Washington Post*. (26 May 2002): B8.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the District of Columbia War Memorial was sponsored jointly by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscape Survey (HABS/HAER/HALS) division of the National Park Service and National Capital Parks - Central. Documentation was undertaken in the winter of 2004 by the Washington, D.C. office of HABS, under the direction of John A. Burns, Acting Chief, HABS/HAER/HALS, Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief, HABS and Tony Donald, Architect – National Mall and Memorial Parks. The project was initiated by Mark Schara, Project Leader. The field measurements were completed by Mark Schara and by Paul Davidson and Andrea Righi, HABS Architects. The project historian was Kristen M. O'Connell. Large format photography was produced by James Rosenthal, HABS Photographer.

This District of Columbia War Memorial project would not have come to fruition without the research assistance of Jeannie Whitler, National Capital Regional Office, Sue A. Kohler, Historian, The Commission of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C., as well as the staff at the National Archives, Washington D.C., and College Park, Maryland.